2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

really a most lovable ruffian, his Christ-like face contrasting oddly with the fanatical fire in his eyes. Hussein, his minister, despite his dirty clothes and unkempt beard, also amused me very much; he carried a huge sword, whilst his belt was always bulging with weapons—knives, Muscat daggers, and a Mauser pistol. He was the living embodiment of Captain Teach, the eighteenth century pirate.

Sheikh Raschid was always pestering me to visit his 'palace' at Ajman and accompany him on a gazelle hunt so, partly in order to placate him and partly because I liked the rascal, I eventually agreed to accept his invitation. I chose a week-end in May when, owing to bad weather at Barhain and Karachi, aircraft had been held up for a few days. Ellis, the Station Engineer, who had performed several tasks for the sheikh, was also invited, and we made arrangements to set off in one of the cars after lunch. A few minutes before we were due to leave the Fort three camels put in an appearance. The servant who brought them explained that Sheikh Raschid bin Hamid considered that they would be more comfortable for the journey.

As a rule I dislike riding camels; I consider they are one of the most uncomfortable modes of transport ever discovered. In this case, however, I was glad of them. The route to Ajman lies through tracks of deep, soft sand, in which the tyres of vehicles invariably get stuck. To extricate them is a long and difficult task, frequently requiring the aid of another vehicle. Soft sand is far worse than mud, and even if the wheels do not sink in it, they slip and slither all over the place, so that it is a matter of extreme luck if you do not hit a palm tree or a rock. Wheel chains are of little help, as they seem to plunge the car deeper into the sand. The only way to negotiate soft sand successfully is to drive at great speed and take a zig-zag course.

Ajman lay to the north of Sharjah, beyond the little fishing village of Hera; the distance was not more than five miles but the camels were slow and it took us an hour to reach the outskirts of the town. There are two Ajmans on the map—the town proper and the district surrounding it, which has an area of about ten square miles. Most of it is bare desert, full of *wadhis* and sandhills, but near the sea-shore there are flourishing date plantations, whereas Sharjah does not boast a single one.

The town is much pleasanter than Sharjah. The track leading to it is indescribably bad, being full of pot-holes, old wells, rocks

work and not for hunting. The Arab horse is much gentler than the English horse, and is very obedient to knee and thigh, and to the slightest check of the halter and the voice of the rider. They are often ridden without bit or bridle, and have great speed and endurance, being able to keep going for twenty-four hours in the burning sun without water or signs of flagging.

At the sheikh's invitation I mounted a little bay mare and, without saddle, rein or stirrup, set off at full gallop, wheeled her round, and brought her up at mid-career at a dead halt without the slightest difficulty. I felt rather like a man-half of a centaur, not a distinct being. This is due to the Arab system of breaking-in.

Raschid begged to be excused for a few minutes while he made preparations for our hunting trip. Ellis and I had brought a small kit-bag each, containing a change of clothes and toilet requisites, and I had with me a Winchester repeater, kindly lent by the American commanding officer; Ellis had brought an ordinary .303 Service rifle. One of the grooms appeared with Turkish saddles and bits for two of the horses; I had chosen the mare, and Ellis a white stallion. The sheikh's horse, a fine black stallion, was fitted with a sheepskin saddle, the reins being decorated with long black and white tassels, with red cloth and feathers stuck over the head-stall, and a little short, frizzy black plume set between the ears. Raschid told me afterwards that he valued this horse at five thousand rupees.

Other servants brought out the folded tents, cooking utensils, rifles and food required for the expedition, and in a short time we were ready to start. The party consisted of Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, a secretary, Ellis and myself, a groom, and two heavily-armed guards, and we set off at a smart canter from the palace in the direction of Mahrid, with two of the sheikh's Saluki hunting dogs at our heels. In this part of the desert the surface was quite smooth and free of rocks, and riding was most pleasant. The heat was intense, however, and we had to wear sun-glasses, as the glare from the sand was most dazzling; apart from the usual short shrub there was little vegetation, and we had ridden for about five miles before we came to the large valley where the gazelle is found.

This valley is about four miles long and three miles wide, with steep, grass-covered banks on either side; the vegetation is lush, with camel grass, tamarisk, clover and wild flowers growing in profusion. Under a clump of neam trees we found a little stream trickling down from the rocks, and we tethered our horses to a